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ABSTRACT

The complexity of today's global realities can be overwhelming and result in profound feelings of chaos. While technology has brought great advancements, it has also brought unprecedented rates of change, job loss, a growing disparity is the socio-economic status of individuals, and a shrinking world in which people representing diverse cultures, religions, languages and worldviews must learn to live and work together. This article presents a psychosocial relationship-centered approach for life career development, decision-making, and living in a global society, based on quantum concepts, for helping shift from a paradigm of independence to one of interdependence, of which relationship is the cornerstone, and the foundation is an ethic of justice and care. (GCP)

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Bless the Chaos! Shifting Paradigms: From Independence to Interdependence

by

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Bless the Chaos! Shifting Paradigms: From Independence to Interdependence

Nancy Carlton

Introduction

The complexity of today's global realities can be overwhelming and result in profound feelings of chaos. While technology has brought great advancements, it has also brought unprecedented rates of change, job loss, a growing disparity in the socio-economic status of individuals, and a shrinking world in which people representing diverse cultures, religions, languages, and worldviews must learn to live and work together. Perhaps at no other time in history is the need greater for the development of our capacity to honor diversity, and acquire advanced skills of building and sustaining relationships to solve difficult personal and collective issues, and ensure a future of the world filled with integrated communities of excellence.

Multiple disciplines have acknowledged the mental models that grew out of Newtonian physics and helped forge the Industrial Era and the Age of Information and Technology are antiquated ways of coping creatively with a global world so powerfully shaped by technology. Interestingly, physics once again, through the "new" science of quantum physics and chaos theory, offers us very different and confounding images for approaching life and it's complexities in the 21st century.

This article presents a psychosocial *relationship-centered* approach for life career development, decision-making, and living in a global society, based on quantum concepts (Gelatt, 2003; Wheatley, 1994; Zohar & Marshall, 1994), for helping us shift from a paradigm of independence (Newtonian) to one of interdependence (quantum), of which *relationship* is the cornerstone, and the foundation is an ethic of *justice and care*. The importance of relationship and its inherent power, I believe, has received insufficient focus in models of life career development, organizational systems, and leadership. The model is interdisciplinary, developmental, and contextual in its perspective.

I believe the approach can be applied to any one in any discipline, role, or life situation where chaos and anxiety threaten to overwhelm the individual and/or group. Following a discussion regarding the need

for a shift in our approach, seven guiding principles are described to help us proactively move through chaos to dynamic intra and interpersonal connectedness and relationship for enhancing our creative responses.

I. The Need for a Paradigm Shift

Over the span of the 20th century we experienced an unprecedented rate of change in our occupational structure, as we moved from an agricultural-based society to the Industrial Revolution, and then to the Age of Information and Technology. Social scientists tell us that this *rate* of change is unprecedented in the history of humankind, and that when we shift from one fundamental era to another, everything within the society changes: social, economic and occupational structures, lifestyles, core values and beliefs. With one shift occurring on the heels of the next, we can grasp the complexity of this change process, and the resulting chaos. With everything in tumultuous transition, individuals, families, and organizations no longer know what rules to play by, what values to uphold, or what the future will be. The knowledge, skills, and attitudes we've mastered to effectively manage our lives in the past no longer seem adequate in the complex dynamics of change today.

Evidence that the rate of change and resulting chaos is not abating is clearly depicted in the recent release of a study conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. The study documented the shipping of 2.7 million jobs overseas since 2001, and predicted that 3.3 million more will follow by 2015. Moreover, the jobs will not be returning; and, for the first time, "economy recovery" (increased production) has occurred without an increase in wage gains (to individual workers). As a result, 1.3 million more Americans are living below the poverty level. One is prompted to ask the poignant question, "Where are the new jobs to replace the old?" This report indicated that, "...the labor market will not regain strength until positions are *created in novel and dynamic economic sectors* (italics by author)" (The Sacramento Bee, Sept. 8, 2003, p.1). It did not suggest what those might be.

To effectively manage this time of change and uncertainty, the field of career counseling and development has responded with new ways of managing and directing this change process. Waterman, Waterman, & Collard (1994) claimed we must learn to be "career self-reliant" and "career resilient." Gelatt (1991, 2003), applying quantum constructs, developed his innovative concepts of "creative career decision-making," "positive uncertainty," and "fuzzy thinking." Gelatt said we must develop a new way of looking at things that would enable us to "think" and "see" differently. I have often heard him say, "Change your view, and you change you."

Adopting a new mental model, however, is easier said than done. Old

habits are hard to break. I recently found this to be true as our department undergoes a major culture shift, and I have observed myself resisting in strange and chaotic ways! Yet, it seems that we live during a critical time in human history, when we are challenged to radically shift our way of thinking, acquire both the skills of self-reliance, resiliency, creative decision-making, *and something more*. The "something more" includes the development of our capacity (and our clients') to be *collaborative innovators* of new solutions to personal issues and conflicts, and the design of new global societal structures. However, embedded in this term is the implied ability to work *together* in a dynamic "*web of relationships*" (Wheatley, 1994).

This, I believe, is not easy. Our psychosocial inability to build and sustain relationships is evidenced by the increased levels of violence in homes, the workplace, and around the world; a growing disparity between the rich and the poor; increased use of drugs and alcohol; and escalating divorce rates that have significantly altered the family structure, to name a few. Issues of intolerance and discrimination based on social constructions of race, gender, and class are inextricably intertwined with all of these issues, as women and people of color continue to experience the highest levels of unemployment, poverty, and imprisonment, and the lowest levels of education and pay.

Believing that technology has done little to truly advance civilization to a new level of functioning interpersonally, Henderson (1995) stated that, "...the Information Age is no longer an adequate *image* (italics by author), even for the present, let alone as a guide to the future. It still focuses on hardware technologies, mass production, narrow economic models of efficiency and competition, and is more an extension of industrial ideas and methods than a new stage in *human development* (italics by author)" (p. 55). She envisions a life beyond economics that values human potential and ecosystems over profit.

II. A Paradigm of Interdependence

A paradigm of interdependence, then, would move us toward a higher level of human functioning, and to new possibilities for creative responses in a time of unprecedented change and chaos. To understand what we need to change in our mental models, we must first understand our current model based on independence. The characteristics of a paradigm of *independence* include the concepts of self-responsibility, individualism, objectivity, intelligence (I.Q.), analysis, distance, and observer; the real, concrete, material and "seen" dimensions; order, control, and certainty; hierarchy, authority, and experts; ultimate truth and reality, black/white, and either/or perceptions; economics, efficiency, competition, profit, machines, and holding power; closed systems; discrete and separate

entities; and an ethic of justice.

On the other hand, a paradigm of *interdependence* embodies simultaneously the concepts of independence *and* responsibility for self *and* others; models of inclusion that honor individuality; multi-sensory perceptions that acknowledge subjectivity, emotional intelligence that includes empathy and compassion (Goleman, 1995), participation, multiple realities, gray, both/and perceptions, and dichotomies; the "unseen" realm – spirituality, intuition, feelings (compassion and empathy), the collective unconscious; chaos and uncertainty; values and elicits the contributions of all people; open systems; sharing power, resources, abundance, collaboration, community building; web of relationships, holism, and dynamic interconnectedness; an ethic of justice *and* care.

The cornerstone or central theme that surrounds and infuses a paradigm of interdependence is *relationship*, which is the fundamental element at work in the quantum world. Because the primary image is a dynamic web of relationship and connection, it is natural that it be rooted in an ethic of justice *and* care.

Bartlett (1992) describes Camus's ethic of justice and care as including, "...the element of *caring* which defines the boundary between those actions which are just and those which are unjust. Justice that abandons care self-destructs. If justice becomes a devotion to the ideal of justice in and of itself, rather than a caring for particular persons, it becomes a tool of oppression" (pp. 86-87). An individual or group adhering to an ethic of justice and care would make decisions and take actions from within a web of relationships, considering both the impact on self and others with empathy and compassion. We would work to develop new forms of problem solving within structured and supportive communities that fully acknowledge and honor our interconnectedness.

III. A Relationship-Centered Approach to Life Career Development, Decision-Making, and Creating New Models for Enhanced Global Living

The model describes seven basic principles for guiding us toward new ways of perceiving and relating, which are merely springboards for igniting our co-creative response in the next phase of a jobless and global society. Thoughtful engagement with the underlying quantum concepts may ignite collaborative innovations for building and sustaining dynamic relationships to create a hopeful vision for the 21st century. The principles call us to:

- Bless the chaos!
- Understand holism
- Create vision
- Initiate integration
- Facilitate interaction

- Share power, and
- Sustain vision

Chaos – Bless the Opportunity for Creating Something New

In our old way of thinking we believed that change was bad, something to be coped with and controlled in order to maintain an internal sense of stability. We have confused order with control, believing that the way to maintain order is to impose more control – on ourselves and others. The more chaotic we feel, the more rigid we tend to become, believing that if we only try harder we will gain the upper hand in the situation. However, we now know that stability is non-existent, and systems naturally dissipate in order to recreate – the old giving way to make room for the new.

The new way of perceiving also recognizes that both positive and negative forces interact to foster positive change, and that chaos and order exist in tandem, for chaos always conforms to a boundary that is revealed only over a long period of time. The lesson here seems to call for faith in the process. The concept of blessing chaos, trusting its role in leading us to a higher goal, provides us with a new attitude as we struggle to maintain perspective in stressful times. It also encourages us to step into the unknown, and actively participate in the guiding of its birth. Active participation is another natural construct, as the quantum world has affirmed that the act of observing influences both the process and the outcomes.

Holism- Embrace the Image of a "Web of Relationships"

Quantum physics discovered the interconnectedness of all living things and spurred the concepts of holism and systems theory. Newtonian physics discovered discrete entities within the molecular universe, but did not observe the unseen waves of energy that *dynamically* connected the distinct parts in a seamless whole. In this system of interconnectedness, a change in one part affects all the parts. This concept is operational within self as a system, a family unit, an organization, and within a global system of diverse peoples, nations, and governments.

Therefore, an interdependent model of life career development places primary value on the construct of *dynamic relationship*. Perhaps one of the most poignant examples of the power of relationship is depicted in the training of dolphins. Using a traditional method of behavioral conditioning and rewards (fish) in the exhibition tank, trainers attempted to entice the dolphins to develop new tricks with more fish. When they failed to do so, the trainers' frustration was palpable, and as the frustration of the trainers mounted, the dolphins refused to participate. However, it was eventually

discovered that when a positive relationship with the trainer was developed and sustained in the holding tank, the dolphins entered the exhibition tank with an explosion of creative activity (Dilts, 1996).

If we, as people, were to develop advanced skills of forming deep relationships with others in the midst of our chaos, would we also possess the potential for an explosion of creative responses to work through the chaos? In this model, the power of relationship is viewed as permeating all aspects of life, and urges the development of deep relational skills for dealing with grief and loss in the midst of change and transition, healing trauma, reducing conflict and alienation, and igniting creativity.

Vision - Envision a Positive Future for Self and Others

Once we have imagined our capacity to embrace chaos, it seems to give birth to hope. And from even the smallest glimmer of hope comes the desire and courage to risk envisioning a positive outcome in the midst of our present difficulties. In the quantum world, there also exists what scientists call "bundles of potentialities" (Zohar & Marshall, 1994) that "reach out" to form new relationships and fulfill their future potential. This quantum phenomenon presents another potent image for us to grab hold of in the midst of chaos, and is similar to possessing a teleological view of humans that believes we are striving to evolve, improve, and self-actualize.

In this view, there is the belief that there is meaning, purpose, and significance in life as we apply our inner passions, intuitions, inspirations, and creative energy in active engagement with the vision, and with others in pursuing the vision. We can collaboratively brainstorm ways that this can be accomplished within a web of relationships.

Integration - Work Toward Bringing Together All the Parts

When "bundles of potentialities" reach out, the distinct parts combine and overlap, creating unique conditions that result in an equally unique whole. This process represents for us a model of inclusion, for by natural law no part is excluded. In this image dynamic relationships again play a primary role, and we can envision a model of self-actualization or a multicultural society that functions at a higher level of intra-and interpersonal communication. This level of inclusion that accepts diversity yet also values the common good is perhaps the most challenging of all constructs to grasp and implement. The next two principles lend some insight as to how we might move in this direction as a global society.

Interaction - Relationship Surrounds all Efforts, Capabilities, and Potentialities

The integrative process unleashes an interaction that is forever dynamic, always recreating, learning, adapting, and changing. As noted, we are all by natural law participants in the process. However, acknowledging that we are human beings with agency (free will), we are empowered to bring to this dynamic interaction the commitment, positive intention, and creative energy to facilitate outcomes that both address individual needs (diversity) and the common good (whole). It does require that we attend to our own deep inner work, as well as developing interpersonal skills. Specific relational skills required at this stage include: initiating and sustaining dialogue with a commitment to the broader vision, the ability to incorporate multiple perspectives and achieve consensus, managing conflict, and remembering that emotional intelligence (empathy and compassion) are at the heart of building relationship.

Power - Risk Letting Go

Reflecting on my own experience with resisting change, this is a tough mandate! As the "bundles of potentialities" combine and overlap, they are blending their dynamic energies to create synergistic and shared power. Since we typically equate control with power, we have the tendency to want to keep the power (Wheatley, 1994). As with the notion of embracing chaos, this is more *inner* work that needs doing, to learn to let go of the need to maintain control and power, trust in the synergistic dynamics of shared power, and imagine new forms of systems and structures built within a web of relationships.

Also, in our current mental model, we believe that autonomy can somehow not co-exist with control, and that the way to maintain control is to sustain a hierarchical structure. In the quantum world, however, there is no such structure; there is only a web of relationships where autonomy operates within the boundaries of a self-organizing system. Both of these notions are huge challenges to overcome in order to move toward interdependence.

Vision - Increase Capacity to Act from a Higher Self

Using our power of personal agency and free will, we can choose to take on the challenge of learning to operate from a higher self. From this place we could more easily move within a web of relationships with deep respect, integrity, inspiration, and wisdom. We would value and foster innovation and creativity, and demonstrate flexibility and adaptability.

We would experience a deep sense of meaning and purpose as we work with others to sustain a broad vision of designing new social, economic, and occupational structures whose common goal is the development of all human potential to create good in the world. This, perhaps, could be our work of the future.

Conclusion

Some time ago I entered a computer store looking for a program to help me overcome my computer illiteracy. By this time, there was a computer store on practically every corner of the city. As I stood there perusing the scene, I noticed a sign above a customer window that said, "Free workshops for the 'technologically challenged.'" Instantaneously, I thought, "Wouldn't it be incredible if one day there was a 'relationship' store on every corner selling products and offering free workshops for the 'relationship challenged'?" In my youth I was an idealist, which gave way to astute realism. Now, I am simply a dreamer, with a great hope for all of us becoming more highly competent in skills of relationship and interdependence.

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